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ABSTRACT

This is a review of James Coleman's 1981 report, "Public and Private Schools," which has stated that private high schools provide education superior to that provided by public high schools. The study is summarized and criticisms of Coleman's research and conclusions are offered in the following areas: (1) method of analysis: (2) use of achievement test results that analyzed elementary rather than high school subject matter: (3) lack of comparability of schools and curricula: (4) Coleman's "segregation index": (5) the use of aggregate rather than individual school information: and (6) the downward adjustment of public school achievement scores and the failure to similarly adjust private school scores. Appended to the paper are three critical essays written by Albert Shanker in response to "Public and Private Schools." (APM)

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A REVIEW OF JAMES COLEMAN'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

prepared by
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In 1966, sociologist James Coleman issued a major study which concluded that schools have very little effect on student achievement and recommended that black students would do better if they attended integrated schools. Among other things, this resulted in widespread busing for racial integration. This study was thoroughly reexamined by numerous scholars and researchers and many of them, including Coleman, later concluded that the original analysis was faulty and the conclusions of the Coleman report were incorrect.

Coleman has now done it again. In April 1981, he issued a draft report, Public and Private Schools,[1] which stated that private high schools provide a superior education in comparison to public high schools. The critics of this new study have been numerous; the supporters few in number. Some two weeks after the release of this new study, James Coleman himself strongly criticized the study and said the data on which it was based were flawed.[2] Coleman said that the most important finding of his study was that effective schools in both the public and the private sectors had certain characteristics, such as an ordered environment and strong academic demands.

Coleman specifically stated that, "Good public schools do just as well as those in the private sector." He went on to say, "It is not insignificant that these characteristics are more often found in the private sector, but if I were writing the report again I would focus more on how public policy can help schools in both sectors to be more effective."[3] These statements indicate a dramatic reversal of Coleman's conclusions of just a few weeks before and do much to cast real doubts on the validity of its findings.

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[1] James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, Public and Private Schools, draft copy. A report to the National Center for Education Statistics under Contract No. 300-78-0208 by the National Opinion Research Center, March 1981.

[2] Edward B. Fiske, "School Study Said to Fail to Emphasize Main Point," New York Times, April 26, 1981, p. 40.

[3] Fiske, New York Times.

Diane Ravitch, an education historian and researcher, has said that the major point in the 1981 Coleman Report is that it refutes the 1966 Coleman Report. Ravitch has pointed out that while the earlier report said schools do not make a difference, the new report says that schools made a great deal of difference in student achievement.[4]

The second Coleman Report generated a great deal of commentary and criticism in the first few weeks after its release, and all indications are that it is not being afforded the credibility and respect Coleman's first report was when it was released. Coleman himself stated in a news conference that such research should never be used as a basis for policy decisions.[5] That seems to sum up the prevailing feeling among both policy analysts and researchers.

I. The Second Coleman Report

This second Coleman Report is one of five studies which will result from the National Center for Education Statistics' massive "High School and Beyond" (HS&B) study. HS&B was designed to provide a data base of longitudinal statistics on a national sample of high school sophomores and seniors. This study began with a group-administered survey in the spring of 1980 and which will have follow-up surveys with the same sample in 1982 and 1984. In the base year of 1980, 58,000 secondary school students participated in the survey.

The National Opinion Research Center, under contract from the U.S. Department of Education, took major responsibility for the design of the Survey and for conducting the base-year survey. James Coleman served as principal investigator.

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[4] Education U.S.A., "...And Say He Contradicts Himself," April 20, 1981, p. 268.

[5] Education Daily, April 23, 1981, p. 2.

The Department of Education's National Center r Education Statistics has described the purpose this survey as follows:

> ...the study's primary purpose is to observe the educational and occupational plans and activities of young people as they pass through the American educational system and take on their adult roles.[6]

In Public and Private Schools, James Coleman and his colleagues use the High School and Beyond data base to attempt to address the following major questions:

- How well do public and private schools work for children?
- Are private schools divisive, and, if so, along what lines?
- Are private schools more easily managed than public schools, and, if so, why?

These research questions were designed to test assumptions about the current roles and functioning of public and private schools in the United States to provide evidence for considering policy proposals for either increasing or decreasing the role of private schools in American education.

Coleman arrived at the following conclusions in his study.

1. Private schools produce better cognitive outcomes than do public schools.
2. There is no direct evidence that private schools provide better character and personality development than do public schools, although students in non-Catholic private schools show higher levels of self-esteem and fate control as sophomores and higher gains from the sophomore to senior year than students in public or Catholic schools.

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[6] National Center for Education Statistics, High School and Beyond: A National Longitudinal Study for the 1980's, prepublication edition (Washington: NCES, 1981), p. 1.

3. Private schools provide a safer, more disciplined, and more ordered environment than do public schools.

4. There is little evidence to confirm or discomfirm the premise that private schools are more successful in creating an interest in learning than are public schools.

5. There is some weak evidence that private schools encourage interest in higher education and lead more of their students to attend college than do public schools with comparable students.

6. Non-Catholic private schools are smaller and thus bring about greater degrees of participation in sports and other activities than do other schools. The fact that Catholic schools are smaller than public schools does not result in increased participation in extracurricular activities.

7. While non-Catholic schools have smaller class size than other schools, and Catholic schools have smaller class size than public schools, there was no direct evidence presented on contact between teachers and students.

8. The report contained no evidence that private schools are more efficient than public schools, accomplishing their task at a lower cost.

9. Private schools contain students from higher income backgrounds than public schools. Public schools show higher internal income segregation than private schools.

10. There is strong evidence that private schools are divisive along religious lines, segregating different religious groups into different schools.

11. Private schools are divisive along racial lines in that they contain few black and thus segregate whites in private schools from blacks in public schools. Internally,

private schools are less segregated than public schools, mainly because private schools do contain so few blacks.

12. Private schools do not provide the educational range that public schools do, particularly in vocational and other non-traditional courses or programs. Even high performance public schools are more comprehensive than high performance private schools.

13. The evidence is extremely unclear about whether private or public schools are more unhealthily competitive, or which provide a healthier affective development.

14. A $1,000 increase in income for all income groups would increase the proportion of blacks, Hispanics, and low income students in private schools.

15. At middle and upper income levels, the probability of blacks attending private school is greater than that for whites. At all income levels, the probability of Hispanic enrollment is greater than that for non-Hispanic whites.

16. Catholic schools are more nearly "common schools" in that achievement is less affected by parental educational backgrounds and race, or ethnicity than in public schools. Also aspirations of students from different parental educational backgrounds are more alike in Catholic schools than in public schools.

17. Important factors in bringing about higher scholastic achievement are greater academic demands and a more ordered environment. This is shown when private schools are compared to public schools and among schools within the public sector.

Coleman summed up his interpretation of the value of this study when he stated:

> The most important implication of the results for American education is not that the average private school brings about higher achievement in some cognitive skills than does the average

> public school. It is, rather, the things about (emphasis in original) those schools which bring about higher achievement, more homework, fewer absences, less cutting of classes, all by students of comparable backgrounds; and in general in a more orderly environment in the school.[7]

He goes on to state the real value of the report is that it shows what things about schools lead to higher achievement.

Other Studies

What Coleman regards as the most important implication of his study is really nothing new. Madaus, Airasian, and Kelleghan in their review of school effectiveness studies[8] shows that some schools or classes do a better job than others in helping students learn. Higher achievement schools or classes are characterized by:

- having a strong press for academic excellence
- valuing discipline
- providing structure
- emphasizing homework and study
- having an environment where students expect, or are expected, to do well.

These researchers furthermore conclude that these differences occurs to a large extent independent of home background.

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[7] James S. Coleman, letter to the editor, New York Times, April 19, 1981, p. 14E.

[8] George F. Madaus, Peter W. Airasian, and Thomas Kellaghas, School Effectiveness: A Reassessment of the Evidence. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1980), p. 174 ff.

A study recently completed by the National Assessment for Educational Progress[9] looked a nationwide reading achievement of 9, 13, and 17 year old students. It showed differences in the performance of public, Catholic, and non-Catholic private school students and showed differences among regions of the country. However, a study showed that when the various populations were equated so that public and private schools shared equal proportions of students from different socio-economic levels, public school students perform at a reading level comparable to private school students, and in some cases surpassed private school performance.

Likewise, in a study completed in England, Fifteen Thousand Hours: A Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children, by Michael Rutter, et al.,[10] the findings were similar. Schools which were successful were those which emphasized academic concerns, homework, and the use of the library. Also, a key factor in the successful schools was having what Rutter and his colleagues call a "fair share" of high ability children in the school. Apparently, the achievement of a whole school is degraded if the more able children are "creamed off" from it.

What Coleman has found is not really new and has been reported in various other studies in the past. The research can be summarized by saying that effective schools are characterized by:

- o discipline and order
- o more time spent in learning and in homework
- o placing pressure on students to learn
- o a quality curriculum and high standards of learning

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[9] National Assessment for Educational Progress, "Reading Achievement in Public and Private Schools: Is There a Difference?", as reported in American Association of School Administrators, news release, April 7, 1981.

[10] Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.

High standards and high expectations in an ordered environment produces high achievement.

II. Criticisms of Coleman

A number of researchers and other critics have noted serious flaws in Coleman's study. Of course, Coleman has admitted some of these defects in his repudiation of his own findings. The major criticism of the second Coleman Report is simply that many of the conclusions do not follow from the findings and are unsubstantiated by the research. For example, as noted above Coleman does not show that private high schools are better than public high schools, but only that there are certain factors which make a high school effective no matter whether it is public, Catholic, or independent.

Method of Analysis

James P. Comer, a professor of psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center and associate dean of the Yale Medical School, has called Coleman's research method so flawed that no one can draw any sound conclusions from the report.[11] He specifically critizes Coleman for the extensive use of questionnaire self-reporting. Much of the data used by Coleman, including family income and other family background data, student aspiration information, curricular program, and quality of instruction, was reported on a survey form by students themselves without verification. To base finely drawn conclusions on such data which are prone to large degrees of error seems particularly inappropriate. No amount of sophisticated computer manipulation can correct for unreliable source data.

Psychologist Donald Campbell warns that the method of analysis used by Coleman may be appropriate for some types of research, but should not be used for causal inference.[12] Of course,

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[11] James P. Comer, "Coleman's Bad Report," New York Times, April 19, 1981, p. E15.

[12] Donald Campbell, "Statement about manuscript Public and Private Schools," in "Seven Scholarly Reviews of Public and Private Schools, Robert L. Crain, ed., photocopied, no date.

Coleman's use of this methodology is to ascertain causual relationships. Others have criticized Coleman for his lack of an experimental design and for using only cross-sectional data rather than longitudinal data.

Technical methodological arguments go on. For example, Samuel Peng and William Fetters of the Longitudinal Studies Branch of the National Center for Education Statistics claim that Coleman excluded important variables from his regression analysis. In their replication of Coleman's work, adding those variables, Peng and Fetters claim that the test score differences between public and private school students are greatly reduced. Coleman and associates, claim that Peng and Fetters are methodologically incorrect in applying a high school program variable in their regression model. Debates like this will go on and it will be difficult for those not steeped in quantitative research methodology to evaluate the arguments. However, it is clear that responsible researchers expert in the specific methodology used by Coleman are challenging Coleman's application of his methodology to the available data.

Test Data

Coleman is also criticized for using achievement test results as a measure of school outcomes. Emphasis placed on the objectives of such tests will vary greatly from program to program and curriculum to curriculum. No place is the claim set forth that the achievement tests used contain the full array of instructional objectives employed in any of the school programs in the schools studied. Most likely the objectives measured by the achievement test items used would match the instructional objectives measured by the achievement test items used would match the instructional objectives of academic programs the closest. Of course, the private schools had a higher proportion of students in academic programs than public schools.

Criticism has been further raised about Coleman's conclusions from achievement test data. Sophomores were tested on items which largely measured fairly elementary prior learning and these test results were used to make comparisons about high school programs. These tests measured learning that occurred before high school, for the

most part, and no attempt was made to determine what kind of school these students had attended. Is it possible that many of the high achieving private school sophomores were the product of nine years of public education? The point is, we do not know the answer to this and this fact casts a dark shadow of doubt over many of Coleman's conclusions. Before such conclusions are drawn, more adequate controls need to be made for educational background.

Education measurement specialists Lee Cronbach has stated simply that the test scores which Coleman used are irrelevant. The tests, according to Cronbach, analyzed elementary school subject matter, not high school subjects. The scores tell more about the selection policies of private schools than they do about high school achievement or school effectiveness.[13]

Comparability

This leads to the cricitism that Coleman has not dealt with comparable school programs and curricula in comparing school achievement. Different schools follow different curricula, but achievement comparisons are made as if there were a uniform curriculum were in place. Does it come as any surprise then, that Coleman found higher achievement in private schools, with largely college preparatory curricula, than in public schools with college preparatory, general, and vocational curricula?

Coleman has really undertaken the task of comparing two basically different samples and trying to compensate or correct for the differences. Most researchers hold that this is impossible to do and further maintain that this is a fatal flaw in the study.

Segregation Index

There has been widespread criticism of Coleman's "segregation index," with the National Center for Education Statistics stating that:

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[13] "Lee Cronbach," Statement regarding Public and Private Schools," in "Seven Scholarly Reviews of Public and Private Schools, Robert L. Crain, ed;. photocopied, no date.

> As applied to this national sample of schools, it (segregation index) fails to capture the essence of segregation, which is the separation of people in a local community along racial/ethnic lines.[14]

This so called "segregation index" is really a measure of racial homogenity of schools. Private schools seem less segregated on this index largely because there are so few blacks in private schools.

According to Coleman's index, if every private school had 100 pupils, of which 99 were white and 1 was black, then it would demonstrate exemplary behavior on the "segregation index." If one of these schools admitted an additional black student, then sector segregation would increase.

The Sin of Aggregation

So many gross misrepresentations occur because Coleman uses aggregate sector information and not individual school information. With the exception of some information reported for high performance public schools, all public schools of whatever type were lumped together. Likewise, all Catholic schools were lumped together and non-Catholic private schools are all combined. This latter category would combine Andover, Groton, and Choate with segregation academics in Mississippi and alternative schools in Berkeley. It seems logical that within sector differences are as great as differences between sectors. Coleman does not address this point.

Self-Selection

Coleman exaggerates the achievement differences between private and public schools by adjusting public school senior year scores downward to compensate for dropouts. However, no comparable reduction is made in private school scores for those students who may have similarities with public school dropouts who are never admitted to private schools or are expelled from them. This contradicts Coleman's

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[14] National Center for Education Statistics, memorandum from Jeffrey Owings and Ricky Takai to David Sweet, March 27, 1981, p. 2.

claim to have controlled for different student composition. If Coleman is to make the adjustment in achievement scores of public schools, he should also adjust for private school discipline problems who are expelled from or never admitted to private schools.

As many critics have pointed out, the private school sample is different in an unmeasured way because it is self-selected. Because parents make the act of placing children in private schools and are willing to pay extra for private school tuition and fees, these parents are different. They are very likely to place additional pressures on their child to achieve and to make sure they receive full value for their additional expenditure for private education. This factor was not considered in the Coleman study.

III. Conclusion

It is clear at this point that this second Coleman Report is a very flawed study which has drawn much sharp criticism in the short time it has been available. To base public policy on its conclusions would be folly.

However, there is recognition that some of its individual findings are in concert with what other researchers have found and probably are valid. The study offers no proof that private high schools are superior to public high schools, but it does point out some factors which high achieving schools have in common.

AFT President Albert Shanker summarized his response to the study in his April 26, 1981, New York Times column when he stated:

> But it's time to stop making excuses. School boards, administrators, teachers, parents should use these results of the Coleman Report as a basis for improving the quality of public education. The American people still support public schools and oppose aid to nonpublic education. But public school support is slipping. If schools don't offer both a safe and orderly environment and a quality program, the public will surely go elsewhere.

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Where We Stand

by Albert Shanker President, United Federation of Teachers

Do Schools Make a Difference After All?

Which Coleman Report Do We Believe?

Last week sociologist James Coleman issued a report comparing private schools with public schools. Perhaps before we look at this new Coleman report we should look at the original Coleman Report of 1966.

That report was the most massive piece of social science research ever done. First, a vast amount of information was collected. There were facts about students, size of school, class size, achievement, teacher characteristics, racial composition and much more . . . just about everything.

Once the facts were gathered, they were fed into computers and then studied to see what conclusions could be drawn from these data. Coleman announced to the world: Schools don't make much difference in learning. It didn't matter if schools were big or small. Class size had no effect. Differences among teachers also counted for very little, except that teachers with better command of the language seemed to have a slightly positive impact on learning, especially among minority youngsters.

What *did* influence learning? Most important was the child's family background—"the home itself and the cultural influences immediately surrounding the home." Schools were ineffective "to free achievement from the impact of the home," and in fact tended to perpetuate those influences because they were culturally homogeneous. For minority youngsters, therefore, the key to educational opportunity was a racial and social class mix. "Attributes of other students account for far more variation in the achievement of minority group children than do attributes of school facilities and slightly more than do attributes of staff," Coleman wrote. Minority youngsters in predominantly white, middle-class schoolrooms did much better themselves and did not hurt the learning of whites. It seemed to verify the common sense of the view that children learn from each other.

The first Coleman Report had political wallop. It was science. It was huge. It was made up of facts, and interpretations that came out of computers. And, it was financed by the U.S. government. Since "per-pupil expenditure, books in the library, and a host of other facilities and curricular measures" had little effect on achievement, according to Coleman, his report gave "scientific" justification for refusing to provide more money for the schools, even for predominantly minority schools. At the same time, the Coleman Report was used to justify improvement in the achievement of minority children through the use of busing for integration.

What happened? The Coleman Report turned out to be less "scientific" than was claimed at first. Other researchers, and Coleman himself, went back to the "facts" and the computers a number of times and reached different conclusions at different times. Coleman himself later repudiated the report and argued that integration through busing was not the answer . . . that busing would not produce integration but would lead instead to "white flight." Meanwhile, whatever Coleman's changing and contradictory directions, the effect lived on. Time and again he was used to justify the substitution of busing for money that the schools needed.

Now we have another Coleman Report. This one says that private schools provide a better education than public schools. While the report must be dealt with on its own merits, it should be known that long before Coleman started on this work, he came out in favor of using public funds to send students to private school. And, it may be mere coincidence—or it may not—that the report was issued just before the Congress will consider tuition tax credits.

Coleman Report II clearly contradicts Coleman Report I. In the first he said that schools don't make a difference, but now, in saying that private schools provide a superior education, he must be saying that schools do make a difference and that some (private) are better than others (public).

The new report was challenged as soon as it was issued. Another massive report, this one by the National Assessment for Education Progress, concluded, after a study of the reading achievement of 100,000 children in public and private schools, that children in both systems achieved the same if you compare children from the same income backgrounds whose parents had the same educational accomplishments.

Coleman claims that his study has accounted for different income levels and educational attainment of parents in private as compared with public schools. But there is one factor even he admits he can't measure, what he calls a "defect" in the study. He writes that ". . . one known difference between parents of children in public schools and parents of children in private schools is that the latter have chosen their child's school and are paying sizeable amounts of tuition money to implement this choice. It seems probable," Coleman says, "that this behavior is an indicator of additional differences in the parents' behavior toward the child's education, differences that could well affect the very outcomes that are of interest." In other words, parents who are paying good money for their child's school are likely to put pressure on their children to get their money's worth.

Like Coleman I, Coleman II leads us to very wrong conclusions. For example, the public schools are made to look worse because Coleman knocks points off their achievement to take into account the lower scores which dropouts would have made had they remained in school! But no similar adjustment is made to knock down the private school scores on the basis of students they did not admit—or students expelled.

It's not hard to see how Coleman achieved his results. It's hard to understand why he wasted his time, or why anybody would pay attention to the obvious. Just as there is a much higher percentage of sick people in hospitals (because that's what the hospitals are there for), there's a much higher percentage of good students in private schools, because if you admit good students, reject poor risks and expel those who don't meet standards, you're bound to end up with better students than schools which accept everyone.

Anyone who rushes to tax credits or vouchers on the basis of the new Coleman Report will be making the same mistake as those who earlier followed his advice in believing that busing would solve our educational problems.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this section every Sunday. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at United Federation of Teachers, 260 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010. © 1981 by Albert Shanker.

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Where We Stand

by Albert Shanker President United Federation of Teachers

How to Shape Up the Public Schools

Time to Ship Out the Violent Students

Last week sociologist James Coleman issued a controversial report comparing achievement in public and private schools. Coleman claims private schools do better. His critics say he's wrong, that it's not private *schools* which do better but the students in them. These are a select group whose parents are willing to pay tuition in order to put them into a school which does not admit problem children or which expels those who don't measure up. The argument will go on, and there's no doubt that because of the selection processes of private schools, they will continue to be different. But, in spite of this, aren't there some things the public schools can learn from the private schools? Some changes which will make public schools more like private schools?

I believe there are three major areas in which public schools need change, and if these changes were made, the attraction of private school education would be greatly diminished. The areas are: (1) safety and order in the school and classroom, (2) increased pressure for achievement and maintenance of high academic standards, and (3) the teaching of commonly held values. The first issue will be discussed here, the second and third, in subsequent columns.

For many parents who have taken their children out of public school, the key issue is safety and order. They don't want their children to experience the trauma of a beating, mugging or threat of being stabbed or shot. Beyond the question of actual or threatened violence, they know that one or two children who are extremely troubled, who constantly act out by throwing things, talking, screaming, running about, can take up most of the time of the teacher and the class, so that little learning goes on. Of course, there are some children who act this way only in the presence of a particular teacher, or only for a short time during a particular personal or family crisis, or only in the presence of certain friends or acquaintances. These problems can be handled, but there are other children who behave this way all the time.

Unless this problem is dealt with, there will be more and more movement to private schools and increasing pressure for public funding of these schools. What can be done?

Jackson Toby, professor of sociology and director of the Institute for Criminological Research at Rutgers University, made some suggestions in the Winter 1980 issue of *The Public Interest*. There is, of course, no simple answer to the problem, but Toby proposes the development of a long-term strategy. While noting that more experimentation has to be done with "rewards for good behavior rather than punishment for bad," he points out that such "positive reinforcement" will work with some but not all violent and disruptive children. Its other suggestions:

• More parent involvement to bring informal pressure on students. "If it could be arranged, the routine presence of parents in junior and senior high schools might have appreciable effects on crime rates and the fear of crime, whether or not parents make a direct contribution to achievement." One way of bringing more adults into the schools might be to schedule adult education courses during the day.

• Expulsion of students from regular schools must be more widely used. Some youth advocates claim that if teachers were more stimulating and curricula more "intriguing," there'd be less violence . . . but, says Toby, responsiveness to the clientele or lack of it "is only marginally relevant to the problem of violence. Rural schools are the least responsive and the safest; some of them paddle students and conduct strip-searches for drugs. *What makes violence likely is weak control.* Big-city junior high schools have high rates of assault and robberies because they contain a handful of students whom they cannot control and cannot exclude, and because they have not devised credible rewards and punishments for the larger group of potentially violent youngsters who are susceptible to deterrence." The first thing is "to rid the junior high schools of the small percentage of violent students who have proved that they cannot be controlled by anyone. . . . This means recognizing that the limits of the rights of students to remain in school for educational purposes are reached when their presence jeopardizes the education of classmates."

• Devising lesser punishments before expulsion is used, such as offering a student who is to be expelled the "option of working 14 hours every weekend at the school—painting, scrubbing, polishing—for three months." This may not work, but it's worth trying.

• Sharing information among school systems about remedies they have devised which work. A National School Resource Network was established to do this under the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Justice Department, funded at $800,000 per year. But that office is scheduled to be eliminated after October of this year as a result of the Administration's proposed budget cuts.

Some supporters of tuition tax credits and vouchers say: "We don't really want tax credits. We agree that they will destroy the public schools. But we don't believe the public schools will ever have the guts to kick out the violent and disruptive. Tax credits will do that. They will place all those who are nonviolent in a tax-supported private school system, while keeping the violent and disorderly in the public schools. Since you can't seem to get rid of the violent ones, you'll get rid of all the others."

It would be a terrible thing if public education in America were destroyed because it lacked the will to expel the hard-core violent. And setting up a huge private school system, instead of kicking the violent out of public schools, makes as much sense as burning down an entire house each time you want to produce roast pork. But the fight to shape up the public schools in this way will only happen, says Jackson Toby, if parents "become indignant enough about violent schools to make safer schools a political issue."

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this section every Sunday. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at United Federation of Teachers, 260 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010. © 1981 by Albert Shanker.

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Where We Stand

by Albert Shanker President United Federation of Teachers

Discipline, Tough Courses, Homework, Tests

Good Schools Put Pressure on Students

Some people seem to be accident prone. Others always seem to be misunderstood. Sociologist James Coleman easily fits the misunderstood category. Each of his reports, starting with 1966, made big headlines, often on page one. According to the newspapers and most researchers who read the 1966 Coleman Report, Coleman said that how well children do in school does not depend on class size, how much is spent on books and supplies or what salaries teachers earn. Students do well if they come from families which are of higher socio-economic status. They do poorly if they come from poor homes. And black children do better in integrated schools than in segregated ones.

Just as the liberals in the Great Society era were about to put more and more money into education, Coleman was interpreted as saying: "Stop wasting money on schools. Spending more won't do any good. If you want to be effective, try busing." But it seems that over all these years, that's not what Coleman really meant—according to Coleman in a letter to *The New York Times* printed last Sunday.

Now we have another Coleman Report—and another set of headlines. Again, the report is being misinterpreted (could it be the way Coleman writes?). Let's make sure that this time we don't lose the real message. What *does* Coleman really say?

Coleman says: The interpretation of the 1966 report was wrong. Schools do make a difference. In "good" schools students will learn more, in "bad" schools they'll learn less. This is true no matter what kind of homes students come from.

Coleman does *not* say—and this is where he is misinterpreted—that private schools are good and public schools are bad. He finds good and bad private schools as well as public schools. Coleman shows that it is not whether a school is public, Catholic or independent which makes it effective —but what goes on in the school. High achieving schools have certain standards. What are they?

- High achieving schools are disciplined and orderly. Action is taken against vandalism and drug abuse. Students know that some things won't be tolerated. There are fewer instances when students talk back to teachers, when they don't obey, when they get into fights with other students or engage in threats against teachers.

- The more time spent in learning, the more learning will take place. Achieving schools press for good attendance. They take action when students cut classes. Each day and each period missed is time lost from learning. But there's more. The time spent learning in school is just not enough to get most students to read and write well or develop their language and math skills. Achieving schools give homework, so that student time spent in learning is increased by 10%, 20%, 50% or more. There was wide variation in what schools did. Some gave almost no homework, while others gave more than 10 hours a week.

- High achieving schools put pressure on students. Let's face it, not all learning is fun. There's plenty of hard work, drudgery, some of it involving pure memorization or the development of habits and routines, some of it plain boring. Students resist doing unpleasant things—as we all do—unless it's more unpleasant *not* to do them. Some educators have the philosophy that we shouldn't put pressure on students—we should just wait until they want to do it. Or, they say, you can't really force a student to learn something. Or, it doesn't really make any difference if a student doesn't learn to read (after all, this is an age of television) or learn good handwriting (he can use a typewriter). This failure of nerve on the part of adults leads to poor learning and, worse, poor character development.

Part of the pressure comes in the form of tests and grades. Grades are not just given out because the student has been nice enough to come to school —or even as a reward for good behavior. Grades are for achievement—test results count. And if students are learning, we can assume that teachers were not selected merely because some college awarded a degree. Some test was applied in the selection of teachers to make sure that they were competent in the subjects to be taught.

- Achieving schools emphasize a tough quality curriculum. Students have fewer chances to substitute easy courses for hard ones. More students take geometry, trigonometry, calculus, chemistry, physics, foreign language. Shakespeare and Dickens are not replaced by courses in "modern media," nor is physics replaced by photography.

While there are good and bad among both private and public schools, historian Diane Ravitch concludes from Coleman's new report that "public schools have lowered their requirements, decreased their expectations, made basic courses optional and learned to tolerate intolerable behavior."

Of course, private schools are selective—*they* choose their students. And *parents* who have chosen to pay tuition will, on the average, put more pressure on their children. Public schools are burdened with the most difficult cases, including many who are rejected or expelled by private schools.

But it's time to stop making excuses. School boards, administrators, teachers, parents should use these results of the Coleman Report as a basis for improving the quality of public education. The American people still support public schools and oppose aid to nonpublic education. But public school support is slipping. If schools don't offer both a safe and orderly environment and a quality program, the public will surely go elsewhere.

Mr. Shanker's [illegible]
Mr. Shanker at United Federation of Teachers, [illegible]